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Managing expectations in participatory research involving older people: what's in it for whom?

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ABSTRACT

Participatory research actively engages participants in some or all stages of the research process – from deciding on scope and problem statement to actively collecting data to disseminating results and effecting change. Considering the shifting roles of participants and researchers in participatory ageing research, to the academic, participatory research becomes a venture into project and people management, local politics, consultancy and community building. First, we present a literature overview of the promises and pitfalls of participatory research. Then, drawing on a university initiated participatory study involving older people as co-researchers in a neighbourhood in Groningen, the Netherlands, we discuss the shifting roles and expectations of all of those involved in the participatory research process. We conclude that a central question that requires continuous negotiation in the participatory research process is: what's in it for whom?

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Introduction

Recognizing the need to address the combined pressures of population ageing and urbanization, the World Health Organization (WHO) stresses the importance of 'age-friendly cities', and promotes an ageing-in-place approach (World Health Organization [WHO], 2007). Ageing-in-place policies emphasise the services and resources a local neighbourhood offers to older adults to provide formal and informal support, familiarity and predictability and addressing independence and wellbeing (Wiles, Leibing, Guberman, Reeve, & Allen, 2012; Lager, van Hoven, & Huigen, 2013; Theunissen & van Hoven, 2018). However, the ways in which older people experience their neighbourhood do not always align with the operationalization of ageing-in-place policies in neighbourhoods (Lager et al., 2013). In recent years some governments have been adapting their approach to ageing policies by employing bottom-up strategies to policy development, actively engaging policy subjects – older people in this case – and giving them a stronger voice in policy negotiation. Tine Buffel's (2015) participatory research with older adults in Manchester provides an interesting and engaging example of local government- research collaboration.

Participatory research actively engages participants in some or all stages of the research process – from deciding on scope and problem statement to actively collecting data to disseminating results and effecting change (see Pain, 2004; Pain & Francis, 2003; Pain & Kindon, 2007; Walker, 2007) thus involving 'end users' in the research from an early stage. Through involvement as co-researchers in the participatory research process, older people are potentially given a voice

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in debates on relevant issues in order to influence decisions and negotiate change (Bindels, Baur, Cox, Heijing, & Abma, 2014; Pain & Kindon, 2007). Such an approach entails that what is being asked of the traditional academic researcher changes from an extractive and analytical approach to a more managing, collaborative and action-oriented approach (Blair & Minkler, 2009; Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2008). Taking into account the shifting roles of participants and researchers in participatory ageing research, the skillset of the academic researcher requires careful evaluation as to whether s/he is equipped to successfully conduct the participatory project. Furthermore, considering the aims of participatory research pertain predominantly to engaging local populations and initiating action, the knowledge produced may not necessarily align with the type of empirical data fitted for scientific analysis (Littlechild, Tanner, & Hall, 2015; Pain & Kindon, 2007).

Drawing on a university initiated participatory study involving older people as co-researchers in a neighbourhood in Groningen, the Netherlands, this paper discusses the shifting roles and expectations of all of those involved in the participatory research process. We address expectations and aims of those involved; resources required to successfully complete the project; and different outcomes to those involved. Prior to exploring the process and outcomes of our project, we give a brief overview of the promises and pitfalls of participatory research, which provides a context for our discussion.

Promises of participatory research

Participatory research is characterized by a flexible and adaptive process directed at local change through a high degree of engagement with participants during and after the research endeavor (Kindon et al., 2008; Pain & Francis, 2003). As noted, intensive participant engagement requires a different, more flexible and practical investment from the researcher compared with a more traditional research process. Successful examples of participatory research give weight to the approach by achieving inclusion, relevance, richness of data, empowerment and effecting change (Kindon et al., 2008; Littlechild et al., 2015; Macauley et al., 1999; Pain, 2004).

Inclusion can be achieved by actively involving the local population and tapping into their local social networks and resources. This way more people are reached and the possibility to include marginalized groups (e.g. children, youths, ethnic minorities or people with disabilities (see Pain, 2004)) that are otherwise difficult to reach by conventional researchers expands and increases. Moreover, by actively involving 'the researched' in some or all stages of the research process, participatory research produces inclusive accounts of local knowledge – giving voice to participants in their own words (Pain & Francis, 2003).

The high degree of participant engagement adds to the *relevance* of participatory research. Especially if researched populations are approached and engaged in the earliest stages of the research process, where questions and goals have yet to be formulated, the project will gain relevance and legitimacy because the voices of the researched give direction to the research (Littlechild et al., 2015).

Most participatory studies produce thick and qualitative data, commonly in the form of stories. The assumption (and expectation) is that participants, i.e. co-researchers, because of their shared characteristics and experiences have the ability to communicate and relate to interviewees more closely. This is found to have a positive effect on the *richness of data* produced (Ellins et al., 2012). From a common frame of reference, older co-researchers are able to converse and empathize with the interviewee, which makes the interviewee feel more at ease to share more and richer information (Littlechild et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2006; Warren & Cook, 2005). Also, in a participatory project involving older adults, it was found that the process of interviewing friends deepened existing relationships (Theunissen & van Hoven, 2018). Involving co-researchers in subsequent research stages such as data analysis, may enhance the academic researcher's understanding of the data collected (Miller et al., 2006).

Empowerment in participatory research is represented by various authors as a means for social transformation, where participants are equipped with the awareness and knowledge on factors and processes shaping their social lives on which they can base social and political action (Bindels et al., 2014; Kindon et al., 2008; Macaulay et al., 1999). Blair & Minkler (2009, p. 652) describe the participatory research process as a ‘co-learning process’ where participants not only learn by doing, but also contribute to the knowledge produced and later use that knowledge in the community setting, long after the research project has finished.

Closely connected to the promise of community empowerment, local populations through acquired knowledge and skills are able to *effect change* through political or social action (Kindon et al., 2008; Mayan & Daum, 2016; Pain & Francis, 2003). Buffel’s (2015) participatory research provides examples of how older co-researchers are able to draw on their own experience of ageing in a neighbourhood enabling them to address the challenges and opportunities in developing age-friendly policies.

Although the promises of participatory research are appealing and therefore increasingly sought after by social geographers, simply choosing a participatory research approach does not tap into the potentials without careful consideration and bidirectional efforts of all parties involved. Even the best-intentioned and well-executed participatory projects often fail to deliver on the promises of participatory research (Pain & Francis, 2003, p. 48). Therefore, prior to embarking on a participatory research endeavour, researchers should carefully consider the pitfalls of participatory research.

Pitfalls of participatory research

Participatory research blurs traditional role divisions in the research process, introducing the researcher to potentially new academic, political as well as practical challenges and dilemmas. In terms of knowledge production researchers should recognize that rather than the uncovering of unmitigated, pristine local knowledge, the production of knowledge in participatory research is heavily negotiated through interests and skills of researchers and participants (Pain, 2004). Therefore, it is pertinent to subject the knowledge claims deriving from participatory research to critical examination (Littlechild et al., 2015; Bindels et al. 2014). Simply because local populations have had their say in various stages of the research process does not automatically guarantee a balanced and democratic empirical representation of the studied subject. Similar to academic researchers in traditional research, co-researchers have a profound impact on the choices made and directions taken in the research process, influencing the quality, nature and representativeness of data, which has to be taken into consideration (Littlechild et al., 2015).

Despite the benefits of interviewer-respondent mutual familiarity and trust, perceived understanding between interviewer and respondents can also pose a threat to data quality because the respondent may not elaborate on topics s/he feels the interview is already familiar with by personal experience (Littlechild et al., 2015; Staley, Buckland, Hayes, & Tarpey, 2014).

Furthermore, power in participatory research can potentially be distributed in such a way that power relations do not differ from extractive or top-down research approaches (Kindon et al., 2008). Labeling a study participatory – perhaps consciously for the appearance of legitimacy and inclusion, or merely ‘ticking the participation box’ (Rose, 2003, p. 405) – while it is in fact extractive, can seriously violate expectations and trust of participants (Pain, 2004). Furthermore, co-researchers that are engaged can potentially represent but a small or elite group in the studied population, therefore legitimizing elite knowledge, rather than inclusive layperson’s knowledge (Bindels et al., 2014; Kindon et al., 2008). In so doing, participatory research might actually reproduce the inequalities that it seeks to challenge (Buffel, 2015). Bindels et al. (2014) point out that the presence of academic researchers might be perceived as intimidating, causing a lack of confidence in co-researchers in terms of contributing to and engaging with the research. As a result, in spite of good intentions of researchers involved, certain groups of participants might refrain from participating, thus contributing to an exclusionary rather than an inclusive character of the research.

Another challenge is the matter of academic publication. To the researcher giving account of the layperson's local knowledge the potential for academic publications might be limited considering how positivist-oriented journals tend to disregard participatory research findings as too subjective and specific (Bindels et al., 2014). Furthermore, numerous evaluations of participatory research question the potential to effect *real* change, socially or politically (see Bindels et al., 2014; Ellins et al., 2012; Littlechild et al., 2015; Roy, 2012). Much of this doubt is rooted in whether the qualitative, disaggregated nature of evidence produced by participatory research projects aligns with policy design (Ellins et al., 2012). Ellins et al. (2012, p. 11) explain how their participatory research's aim was not to only investigate care transition experiences of older people, but also conduct the research in such a way that could 'help embed the findings in health and social care policy and practice'. Although their findings were communicated and listened to by the stakeholders, Ellis et al. (2012) remark that their qualitative evidence was not found particularly suitable to translate into policy instruments (see also Theunissen & van Hoven, 2018). The difficulties related to transferring participatory research findings into practice and policy highlight, as vital requirements for effecting actual change, the importance of a mandate and the skill to translate qualitative evidence into policy and practical measure. Therefore, participatory researchers must maintain a careful self-reflexive apprehension of negotiations and choices made during the process.

The remainder of this paper explores the aforementioned issues in the case of Groningen, the Netherlands. We first introduce the geographic location of the study and the research approach adopted.

The geographic location of our study

The project 'Age-friendly Vinkhuizen' was conducted throughout 2017 in a neighbourhood in the northwest of the city of Groningen. The neighbourhood has a relatively high percentage of older adults (65–80 years); over 20% of the neighbourhood's population is aged 65 years and older, and the number of persons over 75 years is projected to increase by 75% over the next 20 years. It is important to note that the northern part of the neighbourhood, close to the university campus, also houses a larger proportion of youth and young adults (almost 30%) (stad.kompas, 2017). In spite of improvements in recent years, partly as a result of neighbourhood regeneration, city statistics show the neighbourhood as one with a number of socio-economic problems including a relatively high amount of low-income families receiving social benefit, high unemployment figures, physical deterioration, experiences of unsafety, experiences of nuisance caused by youth and lack of social cohesion. Nevertheless, in its 'Zorgen voor Morgen' (care for tomorrow) initiative, the city of Groningen indicated Vinkhuizen as one of the prime neighbourhoods for ageing-in-place due to its age-appropriate housing stock, as well as its wide and accessible array of services and facilities for this age group (within 400m radius from older adult housing). Indeed, surveys show that satisfaction with facilities receive high scores. In sum, Vinkhuizen presents an interesting case in relation to age-friendliness of neighbourhoods.

Research process

The project 'Age-friendly Vinkhuizen' was initiated by researchers from the University of Groningen (UG), who had previously conducted a similar project in an adjacent neighbourhood (see Theunissen & van Hoven, 2018). For the UG researchers the motivation behind the project was to explore what an age-friendly community entails from the perspective of older adults in Vinkhuizen. The UG project group consisted of Bettina van Hoven (senior researcher, primary initiator and supervisor of the project) and two research assistants, Erik Mey and Arlinde Dul, who dealt with the day-to-day work for the project 'on the ground'. Specifically, they recruited, trained and supervised co-researchers, they approached local organizations and institutions to

collaborate with and support the dissemination of results. The project was unfunded, aside from salaries for the two research assistants, and printing cost. Several applications for funding were made to local organisations to support activities during the project. As a result, the project was granted 300 euros from a neighbourhood fund instated by the municipality to support the organisation of an event by and for older residents of Vinkhuizen.

Recruitment of participants

In order to recruit potential co-researchers, several neighbourhood organizations were contacted, including senior clubs, and neighbourhood watch teams, as well as people at the supermarket coffee table. In addition to providing entry points for recruitment, the organisations functioned as key informants and were able to identify current issues relevant to older residents. Early in the recruitment process, UG researchers encountered hesitance by potential participants to commit to the project, as many people indicated they either 'had just participated in a research project' (i.e. by responding to a survey conducted by the municipal government, or one of the two universities in the city), or they saw no benefit in becoming co-researchers. One local resident said, for example, '*Aren't you [UG researchers] the ones who want to research something?*'. Another, frequently heard, response was that people would be willing to be interviewed, but not to interview other residents themselves. As a result, UG researchers spent much time trying to sell the advantages and (unique) opportunities of participatory research to older residents who expressed they had no desire to research anything.

Ultimately, six older adults were recruited as co-researchers. Specifically, the co-researchers team consisted of four men and two women, i.e. Ludwig (age 68) manager of a local community centre, Errit (age 72) an active participant in local activities for older people, Tom (age 70) active as a photographer for the neighbourhood news website, Angelo (age 49) a member of the community watch team with an interest in safety for older people, Carla (age 59) chairwoman of a tenants council of a local apartment building where many older people live, and Katja (age 70), a volunteer consultant in care service provision for the federation of trade unions (FNV). The six co-researchers were all active community members, and they all expressed a keen interest in issues related to ageing-in-place. Whilst Katja was particularly interested in issues related to policy and practice, for example, Tom wanted to know more about social dimensions of ageing. All co-researchers shared the common goal to effect some form of change. Some were more interested in achieving social change through informing neighbourhood residents and creating more awareness about older people's situation in the neighbourhood, while others were particularly keen on bringing about change in policy and politics on the issue of service provision to older people.

Preparation and training of co-researchers

The project was designed to proceed along five phases, i.e. the thematic preparation of the data collection with older adults (phase 1), interview training (phase 2), data collection (phase 3) and analysis (phase 4), and dissemination of results (phase 5).

Prior to the project start, it was important to discuss the framework of the project, including respective roles and responsibilities of the UG researchers and the local co-researchers. Since this was intended as a participatory research, co-researchers were introduced to the idea that it was to be *their* project, that they were encouraged to give shape the aims of the research, carry out the fieldwork (e.g. the interviews) and make decisions about how to communicate results to the local community and interested stakeholder. The UG researchers would facilitate and guide this process.

The first meeting with co-researchers comprised an introduction by UG researchers to the general topic of the project, age friendly neighbourhoods, as well as the provisional design of the project. In order to give the co-researchers an idea of what their project may look like, UG researchers drew on the Age-Friendly Manchester project by Tine Buffel (2015). Using the WHO (2007) eight domains of

age-friendly cities (i.e. housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, community support and health services, outdoor spaces and buildings, and transportation), the co-researchers were asked to think about and discuss age-friendliness in their own neighbourhood. In doing so, the co-researchers highlighted specific areas in the neighbourhood and marked them on a large neighbourhood map (see [Figure 1](#)). As a result of this discussion, five domains emerged that co-researchers felt required investigation in their research; (1) suitable and sustainable housing for older adults; (2) social contacts in the neighbourhood and loneliness; (3) communication and information about neighbourhood issues and activities; (4) neighbourhood services for older adults and (5) safety and liveability in public spaces and mobility.

Phase two comprised an introduction to academic research, focusing on interview techniques and the analysis of interview data. The five domains identified by co-researchers in phase 1 were used to formulate questions in an interview guide. In this process, of the co-researchers contributed with questions based on the domain(s) they were most interested in. For example, Ludwig focused on 'communication and information' and he addressed the demand for and



Figure 1. Neighbourhood exploration session.

experiences with organized activities for older adults. Katja had a keen interest in the neighbourhood care services domain. She hoped to gain first-hand insights into the impact of recent care reforms. Once the group prepared the interview guide, they practiced their interview techniques by posing questions to each other and discussing this together afterwards.

Data collection & analysis

The aim set by the co-researchers was to conduct six interviews within a period between one and two months. UG researchers encouraged the co-researchers to approach fellow, older neighbourhood residents in their own networks to do an interview and then ask respondents if they could recommend someone else (snowballing). In the data collection phase, co-researchers and UG researchers met bi-weekly to discuss experiences of interviewing and developments in relation to gathered information. During the first meeting, most co-researchers had conducted their first interview.

In the process of the project, on several occasions, the everyday realities of research did not seem to produce the same benefits as addressed in the literature. In the following, we explore some emerging issues regarding negotiating the how and what in the research and resulting concerns about data quality.

Even though most co-researchers had similar characteristics, seeing how most were active, local residents between 60 and 70 years old, some power differences came to light on a few occasions. The UG researchers noticed that two of the co-researchers were much more verbal in devising the interview guide compared with the rest of the group. As a result, the interview guide began to become biased towards only two of the five domains. UG researchers then took on a more active role in the discussion and invited suggestions particularly from the more hesitant group members. Although this facilitated a more democratic representation of co-researchers aims and interests in the interview guide – as referred to by Littlechild et al. (2015) – UG researchers also felt as if they had imposed their own academic ideal of a more balanced interview guide.

During the interview training, UG researchers familiarized the co-researchers with the voice recorder as data collection tool. They explained its use and usefulness in interviewing and data analysis. However, most but not all co-researchers were comfortable using the voice recorder. A few group members had initial technical difficulties, but Katja refused to use the voice recorder altogether at first. She resisted the recording device for its visibility and believed the recording would put off respondents from engaging in a candid personal conversation with the co-researcher. In addition, she referred to her professional experience interviewing when she felt she took notes sufficient enough to reproduce the information she needed. UG researchers, given their training in qualitative research and attention to rigour and data quality, tried to convince Katja that the aim of the research was to collect thick data which needed to be transcribed to allow for in-depth analysis. Katja remained unwilling and UG researchers found themselves in discussion, feeling that once more, they were exercising too much control over the project. Reluctantly, Katja agreed to record her interviews but stipulated that if she or the interviewee would feel uncomfortable by it, she would stop recording.

Altogether, 18 interviews were conducted by the co-researchers (Katja 7, Tom 6, Ludwig 5). Three of the original group of co-researchers did not conduct any interviews: Carla, approached the UG researcher by email shortly after the neighbourhood exploration session at the start of the project. She wrote: *'I thought about it and I don't feel comfortable surveying my neighbours'*. Despite efforts by the UG team to explain that she would not have to conduct surveys with residents, but would have conversations with them, Carla never replied and remained absent from following meetings. For Errit, it turned out health problems made interviewing difficult. In addition to being mobility impaired as a result of scoliosis, his speech was impaired because of a stroke some years prior to the project. Although he did not feel up to the task of interviewing fellow residents himself, Errit was eager to stay involved in discussions as well as participatory

data analysis sessions, and he remained involved throughout other phases of the project. Angelo was offered a position as a caretaker of an old school building in the neighbourhood now used as an entrepreneurial start-up hub. He remained interested and involved in discussions, but he was unable to conduct interviews.

In phase three, initiated by Tom, the intention to recruit a representative sample of older neighbourhood residents, in terms of age distribution, physical competence and geographical location was explored in the group. However, it quickly became evident that it was unclear whose responsibility it was to achieve this representativeness. Specifically, when most co-researchers had held their first interview, Katja had already conducted seven interviews. All her participants lived within short distance of her home in the northern part of Vinkhuizen. In order to achieve a balanced sample of neighbourhood participants for the entire project, the other co-researchers would have to conduct interviews in the southern part of Vinkhuizen. This became problematic as all remaining co-researchers lived in central or northern Vinkhuizen and consequently had most of their contacts there. Although the UG team offered to approach potential participants elsewhere in the neighbourhood, the co-researchers preferred to use their own, familiar social network to find people to interview. The resulting convenience sample was an outcome of decision-making by (and handing over power to) the respondents. It demonstrated ownership over this part of the research process but the researchers worried that the overall quality of the data set could be reduced (see also Littlechild et al., 2015).

During the bi-weekly meetings in the interviewing/feedback phase, it also transpired that the three remaining, active co-researchers adopted different ways to plan their interviews. Tom worked diligently, but slowly, producing around one interview every two or three weeks during data collection. Ludwig had so many other obligations as a volunteer in different locations in the neighbourhood, that time was scarce to conduct interviews. Nevertheless, he managed to conduct five interviews before the end of the data collection phase, Katja on the other hand conducted her seven interviews in two weeks in the beginning of the data collection phase. Whilst Tom and Ludwig recorded their interviews, Katja did not feel comfortable using a recorder after all and took notes instead. As a result, for some interviews, full interview transcripts were available and for others notes.

In the data analysis phase, it transpired that although the co-researchers had used the interview guide, Ludwig's interviews revolved mostly around motivations of older people to participate in organized activities, whilst Tom had focused on asking about the social domains of ageing. For Katja, her interest in formal policies, and informing older people about the services and provisions they might benefit from prevailed during the interviews. As a result, the co-researchers enjoyed interviewing since the conversations were a good match with their own interests. However, it was difficult to analyse the transcripts and notes rigorously by comparing and contrasting responses per question (see also Littlechild et al., 2015).

Disseminating results

For the co-researchers it was important to communicate the findings of their research to as many people as possible. In addition to informing local and municipal organizations, the principal aim was to educate fellow neighbourhood residents of all ages on how the neighbourhood is experienced by older residents. Since the interviews conducted by each of the co-researchers ended up having a different focus, the group decided that each co-researcher would independently analyse their own interviews, which would form the basis for individual presentations during the dissemination phase. The individual presentations were intended for a neighbourhood tour in a horse-drawn wagon in which the co-researchers acted as guides to local residents. This way, the co-researchers were empowered to communicate a message that they personally felt was urgent or relevant. The idea to present the results during multiple wagon rides through the neighbourhood was proposed by Ludwig. He had a personal connection to the company and managed to get

a discount. As a result, the group was able to pay for the rides using the 300 euro subsidy obtained for the project. The wagon rides (see [Figure 2](#)) were scheduled on a Saturday, departing from the local shopping centre to reach as many neighbourhood residents as possible. The tours provided an opportunity for the co-researchers to become advocates for the domain of age-friendly neighbourhoods they each felt most passionate about. Specifically, Tom made an appeal to younger generations to make an effort to socially engage older people, if even in the slightest sense. He emphasized that just a casual nod when passing an older person on the street or a friendly smile could be meaningful (see also Lager, van Hoven, & Huigen, 2015). Because she noticed most persons she interviewed were unaware about the services, activities and amenities available for older people in the neighbourhood, Katja focused on educating neighbourhood residents about those issues. And, Ludwig and Angelo made use of the opportunity to inform people about the activities in the neighbourhood they were personally involved in.

The co-researchers noted that the wagon rides were well received by local residents and during four rides some 50 people of all ages including children listened to the co-researchers talk about their research findings. The co-researchers felt content about having achieved their aim to inform people about older residents' views on ageing in the neighbourhood and believed they had contributed to creating a wider base for understanding the challenges and opportunities to ageing in place. However, the group regretted that neighbourhood organizations, local politicians and municipal professionals were absent during this day. Even though they presented those organisations and stakeholders with a report via e-mail, this remained a disappointment for the research team.

In addition to the presentations by the co-researchers in the neighbourhood, the project resulted in an article for a Dutch geography journal targeting Geography alumni, teachers and professionals. The aim of the article was to bring the project (which addressed age-friendly cities from the bottom up) to the attention of readers, some of whom would be involved in managing ageing-in-place top down. For the co-researchers, this illustrated print version (in Dutch) presented a tangible and rewarding outcome of their involvement in the research.

Therefore, looking back, the project certainly effected in co-researcher empowerment, thereby making a contribution to the neighbourhood as a whole in the sense that the experience of interviewing peers and analysing and presenting results has equipped the co-researchers with the confidence and knowledge to inform and advise neighbourhood residents on ageing related issues. As Ludwig expressed during an evaluation of the project:



Figure 2. Co-researcher Tom telling passengers about social aspects of Age-Friendly neighbourhoods.

"I feel I have gained a detailed sense of neighbourhood issues and how older people experience them. Through our project I have learned how to connect different people and organizations. (...) By not only listening to other people's stories, but also sharing my own experiences with them, a level of trust develops that enables me to better understand and help older people – a degree of 'emotional intelligence' I call it."

Ludwig, co-researcher, 68 years old

Discussion

Participatory research is not only a set of methods and approaches applicable to human geography – it encompasses much more than that. It is indeed a process that requires flexible and adaptive qualities of a researcher (Pain & Francis, 2003). Moreover, it is an academic's venture into project and people management, local politics, consultancy and community building. It introduces the academic researcher to different skillsets in which, in every stage of research, the management of expectations of everyone involved plays a critical role in ensuring the effectiveness and success of the research to all participating.

In the early stages of the Vinkhuizen project, the researchers encountered a form of research fatigue (see Clark, 2008) due to the high number of studies already laid out by municipal organizations and the two educational institutions adjacent to the neighbourhood, which caused a reluctance to participate among older neighbourhood residents. The six older co-researchers that did join the project were all active community members, which could suggest the project would merely capture an elite perspective on ageing in place (Pain, Kesby, & Askins, 2011). However, we found that due to their local knowledge and social position, they were in fact able to reach a group of more difficult to reach older neighbourhood residents (Kendon et al., 2008). In this respect the extensive local social network of co-researchers provides the participatory research project with a valuable opportunity to produce knowledge about marginalized groups.

Besides research fatigue, another factor inhibiting willingness to participate was a lack of clarity as to the role division between participating parties. The researchers envisioned their role in the formulation of goals and aims of the project to be a leading one, providing local older residents with a sense of ownership and empowerment. However, to the co-researchers it seemed that the scope of the research was already set before they were approached – which in fact was the case. Therefore, in their eyes, the project belonged to the UG researchers in which they took the facilitating role of co-researcher. This highlights a tension – encountered in other participatory research as well (see Littlechild et al., 2015; Trell, van Hoven, & Huigen, 2014) – between co-researcher empowerment and the academic researcher's inclination to plan and control the research aims and quality of data produced (see also Kendon et al., 2008). While these tensions are widely encountered in participatory research, they are difficult to resolve to every party's satisfaction and consequently end up in trade-offs between e.g. data quality and co-researcher or community empowerment. Therefore, we recommend co-researchers and academic researchers explicitly and continuously engage in dialogues to negotiate and determine expectations across the research process and thereafter. Underlining the importance of this recommendation is our description of how discrepancies in expectations on these issues in early stages of the research carried into subsequent stages of the research, causing a much more intensive role of the UG researchers than was envisioned and the prolonging of the project (Bindels et al., 2014). This process highlights the importance to align expectations from the get-go and to carefully and continuously communicate and manage expectations in all stages of the research.

The management of expectations ties into the coordination of resources made available. One of the promises of the project, and participatory research in general was to effect a degree of change (Bindels 2013, Pain, 2004; Pain & Francis, 2003; Pain & Kendon, 2007; Walker, 2007). The promise of change is also one of the conditions that compels co-researchers to participate. However, without the financial and time budget to give substance to this promise, the participatory project runs the risks of violating participants' expectations. Aspects to consider with regard

to resources are the amount of time available for training co-researchers in data collection, analysis and dissemination, and the expected in kind contributions of parties involved.

Special attention should be given to the project's mandate to effect actual change. While Blazek and Hraňová (2012) and Pain et al. (2011) assert the notion that research impact actually occurs *during* the research process rather than exclusively in disseminating stages of the research, it was clear our co-researchers viewed effecting change as impact through interventions based on research results. The academic researchers could have negotiated these expectations more elaborately in early stages of the research. Furthermore, it remains important to consider a project's mandate to effect change greatly relies on the on-going investment of participants as well as organizations. As it happened in our project, the ways in which research results were disseminated and presented did not align with how local organizations and the municipality commonly use research results to alter their policy. By organizing the wagon rides on a Saturday as many neighbourhood residents as possible were reached, which helped to achieve social change by creating awareness for older people's situation in the neighbourhood. However, the involved employees of the municipality did not work on Saturday, which was the main reason they were absent for the presentations during the wagon rides. Consequently, municipal and local organizations were merely presented with a written research report, which probably had a negative impact on the project's effective mandate for political change – an important aim for some co-researchers. A way for academic researchers to address this issue is to get local organizations with the resources to effect political and policy change to participate and invest in the project.

However, this adds yet another set of expectations to be managed over the research process.

In this article, we described a number of trade-offs to be considered in various stages of the participatory research, most of them revolving around co-researcher empowerment, the production of knowledge and resource investment. In order to avoid conflict and disappointment for all parties involved, there is one central question that requires continuous negotiation in the participatory research process: *what's in in for whom?*

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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